



Affirmation

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An Independent Voice for

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns
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We Looked Good in Pittsburgh

Affirmation can be very proud of its presence at GC 2004. We can also be very proud of the great work done by MFSA, RMN and SoulForce as those organizations also conducted

powerful and wonderful witnesses. In fact, our witnesses were rewarded by tremendous participation. MFSA's low cost lunches attracted over 500 people some days. The demonstration on the GC floor was

magnificent in terms of numbers of people who entered the convention center and the hundreds that joined our march, and the 30 bishops who stood in place to show their support of our stand.

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Progressive Groups Meet in DC

Only action taken – schedule another meeting!

By Diane DeLap

General Conference 2004 is over. Now what? That was the question 18 progressive United Methodists came together on Saturday, May 22, to discuss. Leaders of the major progressive UM organizations, including Affirmation, MFSA, RMN, Church Within a Church (CWC), United Methodists of Color (UMOC), Methodist Students for an All Inclusive Church (MOSAIC) and the Reconcil-

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The Rock Will Wear Away Eventually

We went to General Conference. We witnessed. We did our best to be the drops of water to wear away the stone. We find that this stone is a very hard stone. We did not succeed in wearing it away this time.

With that we recognize that there will be membership losses. Some progressive members will despair of the church ever changing, will tire of the process, and leave for more spiritually fulfilling pastures.

We also recognize that some may rejoice in our pain, having retained and clarified what they see as the 'doctrinal purity of the church.' To you we say that any victory that results in suffering and spiritual injury to others is a hollow victory at best. Our church has failed to declare itself a church to all of sacred worth.

To our members, we say,

*Can we be like drops of water
Falling on a stone?
Splashing, breaking, dispersing in air
Weaker than the stone by far but be aware
That as time goes by
The rock will wear away.
And the water comes again.*

(Meg Christian & Holly Near, Singers & Songwriters, (c) 1976 Thumbilina Music
BMI/Hereford Music ACAP)

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BY:

Thanks for Your Financial Support of Our Witness!!

We Could Not Do It Without You

By Jim Palmquist

Affirmation is an unusual organization, preferring to operate on a voluntary basis with no full time staff. We rely on a group of volunteers located all over the country to execute our strategies as time permits. What we get done is amazing! And even more amazing are the financial supporters that underwrite our efforts and share in our witness even though some were not at General Conference (GC) 2004. They truly join us in spirit.

Our sincere thanks go out to our many contributors who underwrote our effort. We had a significant gift from a good friend of Affirmation that provided our conference center office space a block from the Convention Center in Pittsburgh and who also underwrote the entire cost of the "Love Makes A Family" photo exhibit. Special recognition also goes to Sam Wilson, the Owner and General Manager of the Red Lion Hotel in Bakersfield, CA, who sponsored our newsletter for GC and whose hotel was featured in each issue. [By the way, it is a great place to stay when you are in Bakersfield.]

We are thankful to the num-

ber of Affirmation members, Council members and Strategic Visioning Task Force members for their significant gifts that catapulted forward our witness at GC. Thanks to the dozen participants in our Major Gifts Solicitation, who invited new people to support us and resulted in several new contributors this year. In addition, we are blessed with having many supporters who provide gifts that, added together, make it possible to witness to the truth at GC. It seems our message is taking hold and that shows up in our fundraising results.

Our Treasurer, Rusty Norment, who has worked intensively for the past year, recording gifts from our supporters, monitoring our cash position and critically watching spending while sending thank you letters in a timely manner for gifts according to Federal requirements.

Thanks to our membership renewal officer, Gary Shephard, for the great job he does by asking for annual membership renewals which is a large part of our annual fund raising and his running our GC mail solicitation program that put us over the

Affirmation Newsletter

This Affirmation newsletter is a quarterly publication. Only Affirmation's elected spokespersons may represent the official positions of this organization. Opinions here signed or unsigned are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

Co-Editors:

Judy WestLee
Gary Shephard

Affirmation's Mission Statement

Affirmation is an activist caucus of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, our families and friends organized to speak for ourselves. Together we:

Proclaim a gospel of respect, love and justice;

Relentlessly pursue policies and processes that support full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in all areas and levels of the United Methodist Church:

Overcome the barriers that diminish our common humanity by excluding or judging people because of their race, gender, class or physical abilities;

Empower people to undertake works of inclusion and justice where they are.

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Thanks...

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top.

Thanks to John Calhoun, our Financial Manager, who controls our bank account, advises us on cash box operations and helps solicit major gifts to support our work.

It is our contributors who share in our vision for a Church where all are welcome and none are excluded based on prejudice, that generously make it happen. They make it possible to extend their passion to change hearts within the United Methodist Church year after year and make it possible for us to represent them at GC. I predict that it won't be too many more years before the General Conference will vote to agree with us and our emphasis will shift to our grass roots work in changing this denomination church by church.

Thanks to all for your support, including financial, other resources, ideas and energy that give Affirmation its powerful vitality.

**GC 2004
Partner
Listing
Will Be Printed
In Summer
Newsletter**

Newsletter Editor Sought

Affirmation's esteemed and overqualified newsletter editor, Judy WestLee, is leaving her position as newsletter editor. **(EDITOR'S NOTE: "esteemed"? I had no idea I was that old!)**

The Communications Team is looking for volunteers who may have the skill, patience, and grace to step into Judy's shoes. The newsletter is quarterly. Article assignment is most often done at Council meetings, with the coordinators of the Council. The editor is responsible for layout, and editing for style and space. The editor is responsible for sending the layout and contents in final format to the production and

distribution team. The Communication Team plans to separate the production and distribution from the editors responsibilities.

Please contact Ken Rowe, [REDACTED] if you are interested in the position or have further questions as to the responsibilities.

This is the last newsletter edited by Judy.

Thanks, Judy, for your great work on the regular newsletter, and to Judy and Gary for their work on the General Conference daily Affirmation newsletter *Drops of Water*.

RETREAT DATE CHANGE!!

**"Hope and Healing: Surviving in the Wilderness"
Oct. 15-17, 2004, Chicago Area Site TBA**

In response to a request from our United Methodist progressive caucus partners, Affirmation has changed the date of our previously announced fall retreat so that our Council members can be part of a joint gathering of Boards/Councils in Chicago Oct. 15. We hope you will understand Affirmation's desire to accommodate our partners. We do apologize if you are unable to make this adjustment in your calendar.

Retreat participants will gather Friday evening, Oct. 15. The retreat will end mid-day Sunday, Oct. 17.

Randy Miller of Emeryville, CA, will co-lead the retreat with a female leader yet to be confirmed. Watch for further details in the July-August issue of this newsletter. We intend to have scholarships available for those unable to otherwise attend. We look forward to you joining us for this time of renewal and fellowship so that we can strengthen ourselves and each other for individual and collective journeys into the future.

Progressive Groups Meet ...

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ing Clergy participated in the forum held on the Wesley Seminary campus. Representing Affirmation were Council members Peggy Gaylord and Diane DeLap, along with newly elected Council members Vivian Waltz and David Meredith.

The meeting opened with a devotional reminder of Jesus' parable of the "persistent widow," from Luke 18, given by Barbara Ricks Thompson. The attendees were reminded that it was only after many calls that the widow received the justice she requested, and that the model must be "constancy in naming the injustice."

Following this, the participants were given an opportunity to share individual reflections on the actions of GC2004. Both those who had attended GC and those who had not, reflected on their perceptions of the Conference. Several of those who had been at GC mentioned the witness of the many volunteers who gave their time and efforts to the work of the various progressive groups. One person who had not been at GC recounted talking to a member of her church who had been there and who told of spending "the entire time chopping carrots" for the various meals served at Smithfield Church, but also spoke of the many conversa-

tions she had as she served the meals that encouraged her. Groups of students from various seminaries and MOSAIC were mentioned as being "stalwart" as they led hundreds of Common Witness observers in the Conference hall to stand during the votes taken on petitions that would further restrict the church's inclusiveness. Others told of the feelings of rejection that resurfaced when they either experienced the votes of the Conference or heard news of them. One person mentioned that the LGBT members of his church felt devastated again and described the experience in the terms of an abuse – like they were beaten up again.

No one in the group expressed satisfaction with the so-called "Unity" resolution that was passed in the last day of the Conference. One person present who had been involved in the crafting of the resolution mentioned that there had been a specific intention to leave out the word "unity" from it, and expressed his disappointment that it was being billed as a Unity statement. Many also mentioned feeling the hypocrisy of passing a resolution that declares that "we remain in covenant with one another, even in the midst of disagreement, and reaffirm our commitment to work together" almost unanimously (Yes, 869;

No, 41; Abstain, 8) on Friday after they had voted repeatedly on Tuesday to reject similar wording in other proposals.

With all of the negative feelings around the votes taken on GLBT-focused issues, there were a number of positives mentioned. It was mentioned that the realignment of the delegate numbers voted on in GC2000 should have given conservative elements a much larger margin of victory. The votes however, in some cases, were passed by narrower margins instead. Also, most of the conservative petitions failed. One that failed was the petition to prevent Transgender UM's from serving as Clergy. Also a "gender identity" category was added to a non-discrimination clause.

Following this time of reflection, the group got down to work on some discussion of proposals for moving forward. Each person took a few moments to write down their vision of what progressive movements need to emphasize. The results were then shared with the entire group and were broken down into strategy areas, which were further discussed in small groups focusing on each area. A number of

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Let's Be in Mission to Haiti

By Dr. Rick Huskey, M.D., D.
Min., M.Div.

Every year there are new challenges and opportunities to demonstrate God's love to everyone beyond the church parking lot. During this past year in what limited free time I have, I spent hours in the company of The Episcopal St. Vincent's Sisters of Charity, here in Martinsburg, WV. Better than being on the streets at my age.

I love these "Blue Nuns" as I call them. They wear navy-blue habits for most of the ecclesiastical-calendar year. However, in hot weather they break out in lovely, powder blue outfits. I am very careful around them because in spite of their habits, these women pack a real theological punch. I have seen them bring changing and transforming experiences to everyone they meet. Powerful is God's love as expressed through the lives of blue-uniformed women!

In mid-November 2003, I attended Trinity Episcopal Church. Caught off guard at coffee-hour by Sr. Miriam, she asked three questions: 1. How was my French? 2. What was I doing in 72 hours this Wednesday morning? And 3. Did I have a valid US passport?

The Sister explains Fr. Phil

cannot go and I "must substitute." She added, "Rick, go home, pray, take a Sunday afternoon nap, and when you wake up you'll find any obstacles are disappearing." "To Haiti you go."

She was right. The request came at a not-too-busy period in the practice year. My colleagues were able to cover me.

So, off to Haiti I went with the Blue Nuns. Went so fast that I borrowed a dose of anti-malarial meds from a fellow missionary. "Nature affects missionaries, too," I was told. Then I realized I was on a mission! According to Sr. Miriam I was a medical missionary. So basic a concept by which to be identified! So Christian! With Jesus in my heart I was on a mission to Haiti.

We landed and, Dear Jesus, it all began! Bribes at the airport between Haitian colleagues and customs officials over getting necessary medical supplies and equipment to the waiting SUV's. Once outside immigration the "sea gull effect" was in full gear as Baptist missionaries gave a few coins to a few children and dozens more appear.

Haiti is lush green with beautiful beaches. All the

cities are basic concrete and rebar. Roads are dirt-based, rock-laden, puddle-filled and house mosquitoes. Haiti is America's poorest neighbor.

Our mission was to help the nuns' name sake hospital in downtown Port-Au-Prince, *St. Vincent's Hospital for Handicapped Children*. Imagine the fates of handicapped children in this abusive, exploitative society.

Dear LGBT Christians and supporters, create time to go on a mission. We are needed.

Our world is so small and we are a part of the shrinkage. We, too, receive God's love. LGBTQ Christians and supporters need to respond to God's call with love. Perhaps in our journeys outside the church parking lots we can learn that possessions may indeed be obstacles in the path toward God.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Rick graduated from seminary, was ordained as a deacon and was approved to be ordained as an elder in the Minnesota Annual Conference. He came out to his Board of Ordained Ministry. Rick's ordination was cancelled. He went on to get his Doctor of Medicine. Today Rick is a Geriatric Internist practicing in Washington, DC. He can be reached at [REDACTED])

Looking Good...

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Affirmation's Judy WestLee and Gary Shephard helped write, edit and produce eight four-page purple newsletters (typically 1,500 copies each) under the masthead "Drops of Water", subtitled "As Time Goes By The Rock Will Wear Away". Our writers included Diane Delap, Peggy Gaylord, Ken Rowe, Michael Bledsoe, Jeanne Knepper.

We had many people distributing newsletters early every morning including John Calhoun, Diane Delap, Richard Bates, Joe Santoyo, Mary Knightwright, Will Green, Tiffany Steinwert and many others too numerous to list.

And we are particularly thankful to the Bakersfield, CA, Red Lion Hotel and its owner, Sam Wilson, for its support of our newsletter.

John Calhoun and Rusty Norment were involved in planning and wrapping up the financial issues (fund raising and cash management at GC 2004). Kathryn Mitchem, John and Gary conducted the Membership Meeting and Annual Corporate Meeting. At that meeting, David Meredith (OH), Vivian Waltz (PA) and Margo Tenold (CA) joined the Affirmation Council.

Peggy Gaylord and Ken Rowe,

our Spokespersons maintained connection with the coalition partners, represented us in meetings with people who resist our stand. They represented us in the media while they have been networking and articulating the vision of Affirmation to the church. Peggy and Ken carried the large Affirmation banner during the demonstration "crossing the bar" of the General Conference on Thursday, May 6. Peggy also arranged for the "Love Makes A Family" photo exhibit and also got it underwritten by one of our greatest supporters. Ken created the "Hot Water Topics" that spoke to current issues on our movement.

Diane DeLap facilitated the Lunchtime Video discussions on trans and bi subjects and we were proud of her work, introducing the trans issues at GC this year. Diane also is a computer whiz and did a lot of desktop publishing during GC. She also arranged for the reproduction of the "Valentine Books" which were sold at GC.

Kathryn staffed the Meet-here.com conference center space from 6:30 a.m. to 12 noon weekdays. She dealt with every question and issue that came up in an energetic and competent way that endeared us all to her. She

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National Council

John R. Calhoun
South Central Jurisdiction
Oklahoma City, OK
[REDACTED]

Diane DeLap
At-Large
Wilmington, MA
[REDACTED]

Rev. Peggy R. Gaylord,
Co-Spokesperson
At-Large
Binghamton, NY
[REDACTED]

Walt Jackson
North Central Jurisdiction
Madison, WI
[REDACTED]

Rev. David Meredith
At-Large
Columbus, OH
[REDACTED]

Kathryn Mitchem, Co-Convener
Southeast Jurisdiction

Clarence R. (Rusty) Norment
At-Large
Mechanicsville, VA
[REDACTED]

Jim Palmquist
At-Large
Macungie, PA
[REDACTED]

Rev. Kenneth I. Rowe,
Co-Spokesperson
Western Jurisdiction
San Francisco, CA
[REDACTED]

Rev. Margo Tenold
Western Jurisdiction
[REDACTED]

Rev. Vivian Waltz
At-Large
Alum Bank, PA
[REDACTED]

Looking Good...

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was supported by Mary Knightwright, Linda Lacy and others.

Janet WestLee managed the Hospitality/Resource Room at our very large gymnasium where we conducted about 60 events over 10 days. She kept track of every sale. She also helped out solving problems in the gym, helping to get meals prepared and cleaned up, maintaining displays, maintaining information and on upcoming events.

Many Affirmation volunteers were been plugged into the Common Witness volunteer pool and were involved in many activities at GC 2004.

Jim Palmquist discovered the Smithfield Church facility and the Holiday Inn Express that the coalition used. Jim served as one of two liaisons with Smithfield Church administration and coordinated many logistics. Jim hung the "Love Makes a Family" Exhibit.

As an all-volunteer organization, Affirmation couldn't exist or be a presence at GC without help from people like you. Thanks to all who make it possible to witness to an inclusive church. We are here. It's not debatable.

Progressive Groups...

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options for action were discussed, but no decision was made as to the advisability of any particular strategy.

A great deal of discussion took place around the issue of schism. Several people noted that it was the right that had raised the issue and that progressive movements had consistently resisted discussion of schism. A number of those present expressed the feeling that now was the time to begin discussions of splitting from the UMC. One issue was the inclusion of such groups in future progressive UM. Significant discussion was given to the dual goals to "1) Strengthen and affirm the movement of those who are willing to move or are moving toward denominational schism or leaving the denomination in order to experience and grow the church of our Common Vision;" and/or "2) Strengthen and affirm the movement of those who are committed to remaining within the denomination and working for its transformation to the church of our Common Vision."

The following issues were discussed and consensus on each was sought.

- Ecclesiastical disobedience (obedience)
- Staying in or leaving the UMC
- Clergy willing to expose themselves to

the possibility of being expelled.

- What would it mean to become something other than a white-centered, white-dominated movement?

The only real decision to come out of the meeting was to meet again in Chicago Oct. 15 for a full day of further discussion, and to invite all those individuals who had signed the Common Witness statement to have representatives of their groups present. In the interim, all of the groups present and those to be invited are to discuss among their constituency their concerns as well as the issues noted above.

With that in mind, and since it is the LGBT community that composes much of Affirmation's membership that was the most directly damaged by the continuing actions of the General Conference, I would suggest you take time to contribute your thoughts as to specific directions Affirmation should take moving forward. You can send your thoughts to umaffirmation@yahoo.com or to Affirmation, PO Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204. Finally, I would suggest that the Affirmation retreat planned in the Chicago area Oct. 16 and 17 would be a good time for the membership to come together and discuss future directions.

How The Loyalty Pledge Should Read After GC 2004

Will you be loyal to The United Methodist Church, and uphold it by your prayers,* your presence,** your gifts,*** and your service****?

If you self identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, please see these footnotes:

* You're welcome to pray all you want, but God isn't listening until you clean up your act and become heterosexual with no gender identity issues, so you might want to save your time.

** Just dress normal and don't call attention to yourself.

*** Your money spends just as well as anyone else's so don't think we're letting you out of this one.

**** We don't mind if you do the flower beds at your own expense or sing in the choir or mop the floors or vacuum the narthex. Just don't expect to sit on any important committees with voice and vote, and don't expect to be elected lay delegate to annual conference. Definitely don't bother going to seminary thinking we're going to ordain you. That "call" thing is either indigestion or a figment of your imagination. Lie down quietly until it passes.